

BACKGROUND

- The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is considered the largest healthcare delivery system in the United States and is comprised of 1,293 health care facilities in the US.^{1, 2}
- The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality Medical Expenditure Panel Survey of 2017, showed that Veterans ages 18-79 have higher rates of hypertension, high cholesterol, heart disease, and cancer compared with non-Veterans.³
- With several eligibility requirements for enrollment, VHA provides healthcare for about 45% of all U.S. Veterans, leaving the question if over 10 million Veterans not receiving VA benefits are having their health needs met.¹

OBJECTIVE

- To survey the general health needs, barriers to care, and perceptions of healthcare among U.S. veterans residing in Illinois.

METHODS

Study Design

- Retrospective, observational, cross-sectional survey study.
- 16-question survey that collected demographic information, health coverage, chronic health conditions, and a gauge agreement to statements concerning attitudes to patient care.
- Social media was the main method of distribution used to reach out to Veterans across the state. Other forms of distribution were requesting community colleges and public universities in Illinois to share the survey link with Veteran students in their institution, and flyers shared with Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and American Legion Halls.

Inclusion Criteria

- U.S. military Veterans
- Resided in Illinois at the time of survey completion

Study Measures: Dependent Variables

- The primary outcome was to identify potential disparities in access to health services for Illinois veterans.

Study Measures: Independent Variables

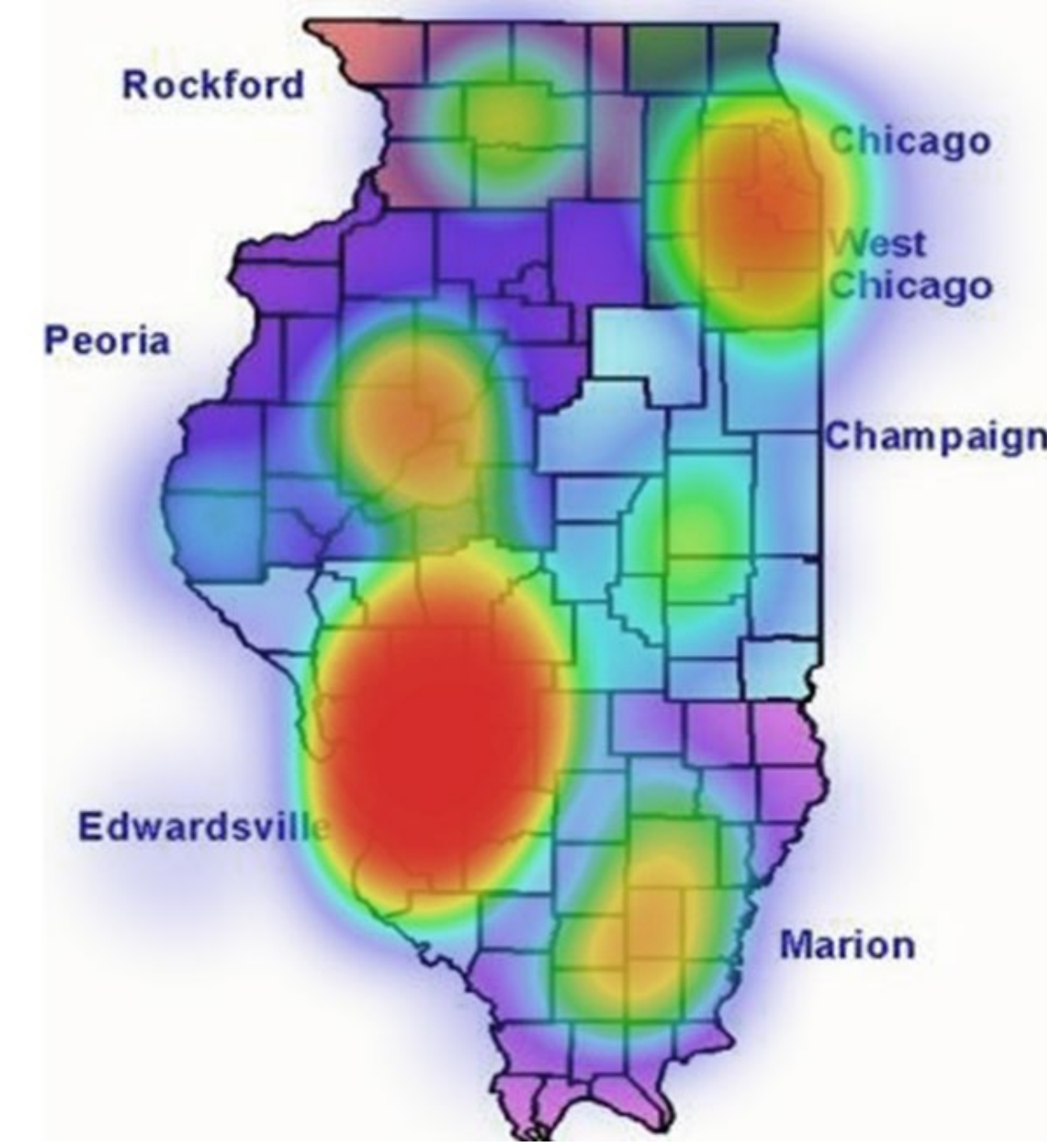
- Age, race, gender, education level, region of residence, prior branch of service, discharge status, and current health insurance provider.

Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics
- Qualtrics software analysis

RESULTS

Table 1: Respondent Pool's Distribution by region (N = 158)

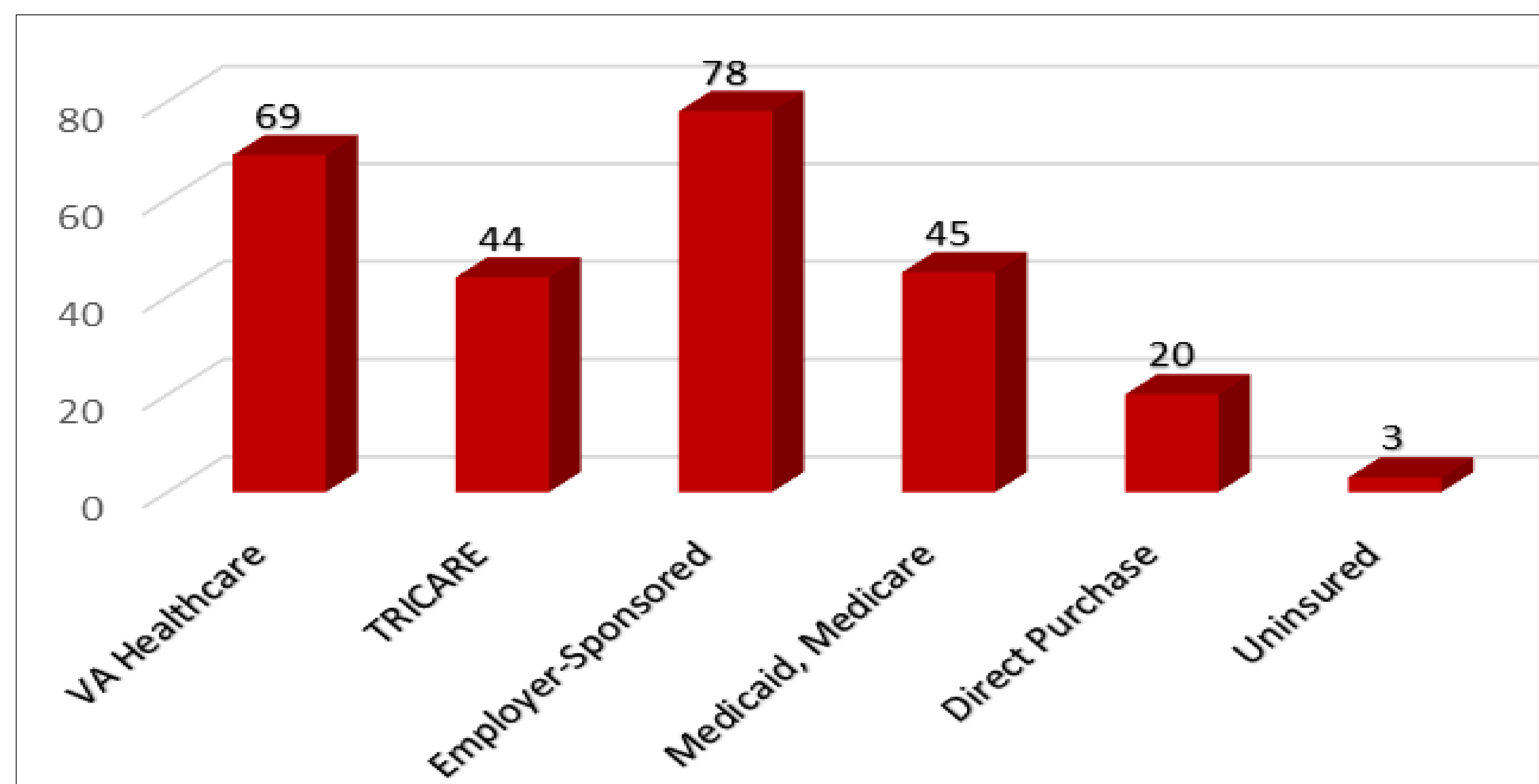


| Region | Strongly disagree N (%) |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| Champaign | 12 (7.59%) |
| Chicago | 9 (5.70%) |
| Edwardsville | 72 (45.57%) |
| Marion | 22 (13.92%) |
| Peoria | 22 (13.92%) |
| Rockford | 7 (4.43%) |
| West Chicago | 14 (8.86%) |

Table 2: Demographic Information

| | Strongly disagree N (%) | Disagree N (%) | Neutral N (%) | Agree N (%) | Strongly agree N (%) |
|--|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Within the past 90 days, I experienced a medical issue that required or likely required the attention of a medical professional. | 30 (20.13%) | 29 (19.46%) | 16 (10.74%) | 41 (27.52%) | 33 (22.15%) |
| I am not likely to seek medical attention because I prefer to handle medical issues on my own. | 34 (22.82%) | 44 (29.53%) | 44 (29.53%) | 22 (14.77%) | 5 (3.36%) |
| I am likely to avoid seeking medical attention. | 39 (26.17%) | 55 (36.91%) | 17 (11.41%) | 30 (20.13%) | 8 (5.37%) |
| I know where to go to be seen by a medical professional when I have a medical issue or need to receive treatment. | 5 (3.36%) | 5 (3.36%) | 13 (8.72%) | 56 (37.58%) | 70 (46.98%) |

Table 3: Health Insurance Providers

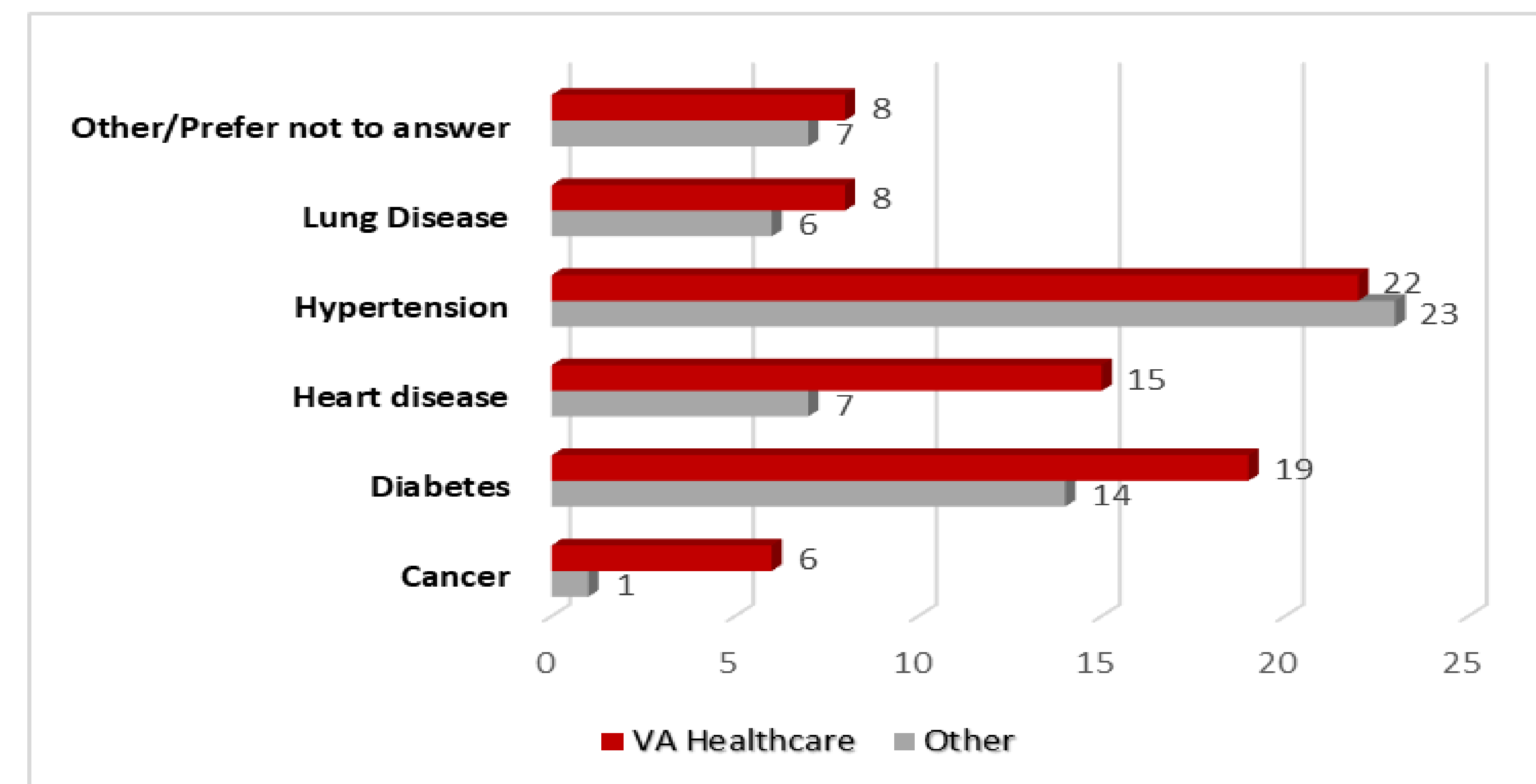


RESULTS

Table 4: Insurance provider other than VA

| I am not enrolled in VA Health Care because: | N=87 N (%) |
|--|-------------|
| I did not qualify | 9 (10.34%) |
| I did not know it was an option | 19 (21.84%) |
| I needed more guidance on how to apply | 28 (32.18%) |
| I did not want to apply | 15 (17.24%) |
| Other/Prefer not to answer | 16 (18.39%) |

Table 5: Chronic conditions



CONCLUSIONS

- Mistrust of medical professionals, distance to healthcare sites, and financial reasons were the main barriers identified that could prevent Veterans access to health services.
- Although 73% of all participants were not enrolled in VA Healthcare, 97% of these respondents had other health insurance providers, showing that, to an extent, some of their health needs are being met.
- The high number of respondents indicating they were unaware that VA Healthcare was an option or respondents that needed more guidance on how to apply may indicate the need to improve or establish a system that ensures all Veterans are being educated on their VA benefits and other available resources.

REFERENCES

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